

# An Archaeological Survey of **Gruinard Island**



Centred on NG 94418 94047

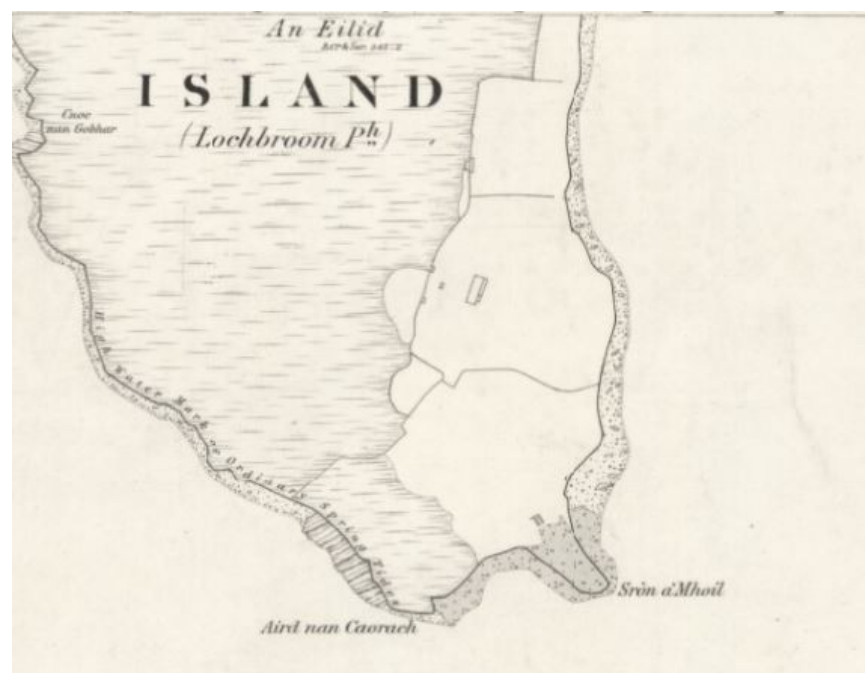
Jim Buchanan and Anne MacInnes  
With assistance from Gordon Grant and Karen Buchanan  
Not forgetting our boatman Hugh Macintyre  
Thanks to Ian Scrivener- Lindley for help with interpretation of aerial  
photos

Photos by Anne, Karen, and Hugh  
Drone shots by Jim.

Gruinard Island lies within Gruinard bay and measures roughly 2 by 1 km. The survey took place as part of a study of the island for Gairloch Museum and its history is documented within the report. Looking across to the island, there are cliffs, a raised beach level, gravel spit, and sloping hillsides running from the highest point at An Eilid 106m to the shoreline. However on arriving at the island we found that the landscape was covered in deep moss, grass and heather making any survey extremely difficult and probably covering many features that remain hidden. Roy's Military map 1747 shows a cluster of buildings and cultivation on the SE part of the island, ( see report) and the 1st and 2nd ed OS show unroofed buildings and walls.

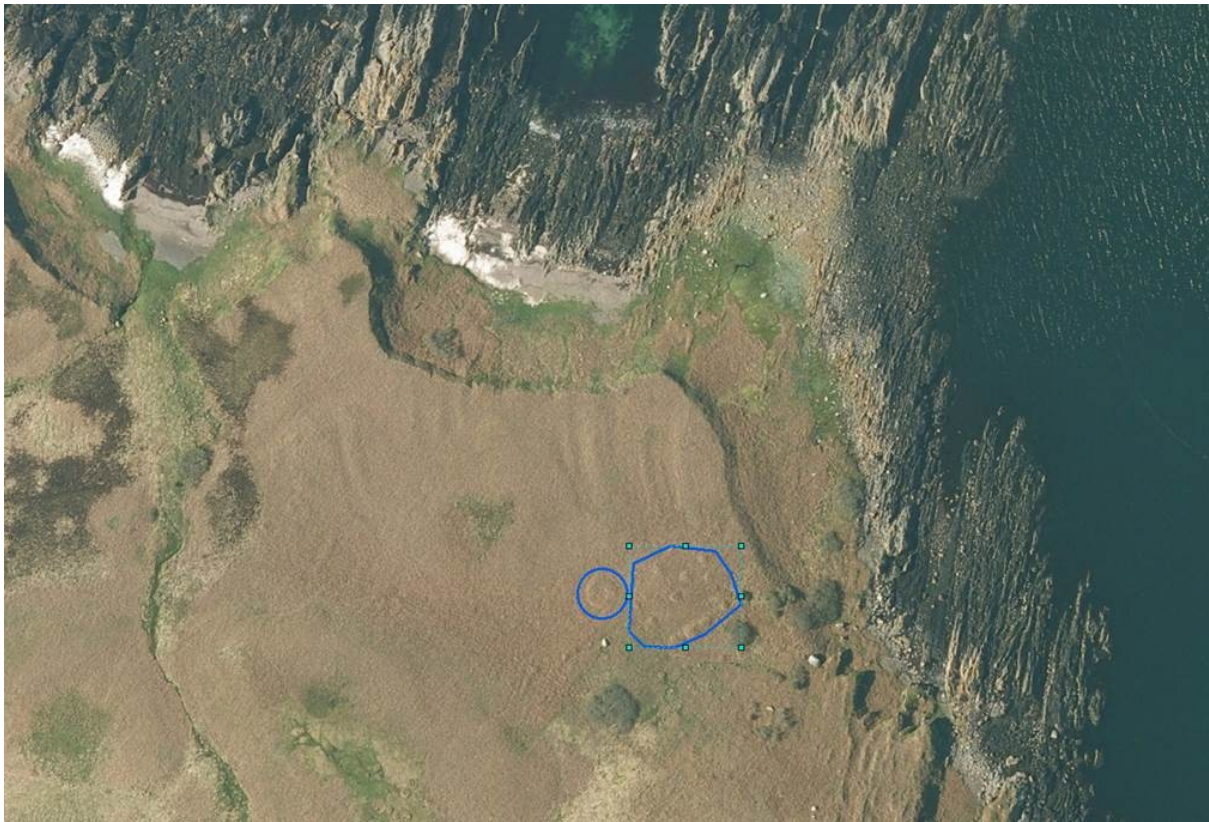


1st ed. OS map



2nd ed. OS map

Looking first of all at aerial photos of the island before going over to survey, ruins and walls in the SE of the island were noted. However in the NE section of the island located at NG 94470 94972 There appears to be a probable roundhouse with associated enclosure and clearance piles. We were



not able to confirm this due to access difficulties. However this would indicate that the island has been used since prehistoric times. There are roundhouses on nearby Isle Ewe and on the mainland opposite the island.

Our survey concentrated on the SE of the island.

Looking across to the island it is easy to pick out the cultivation lines of broad and narrow rigs.







This evidence of improved cultivated land is in the SE of the island as indicated on the OS maps.  
There is no cultivation or grazing on the island now. ( see report)  
Approaching the island the lines are clear as is the level of the raised beach.



From the study of aerial photos and our walkover survey the areas and lines of cultivation have been marked.



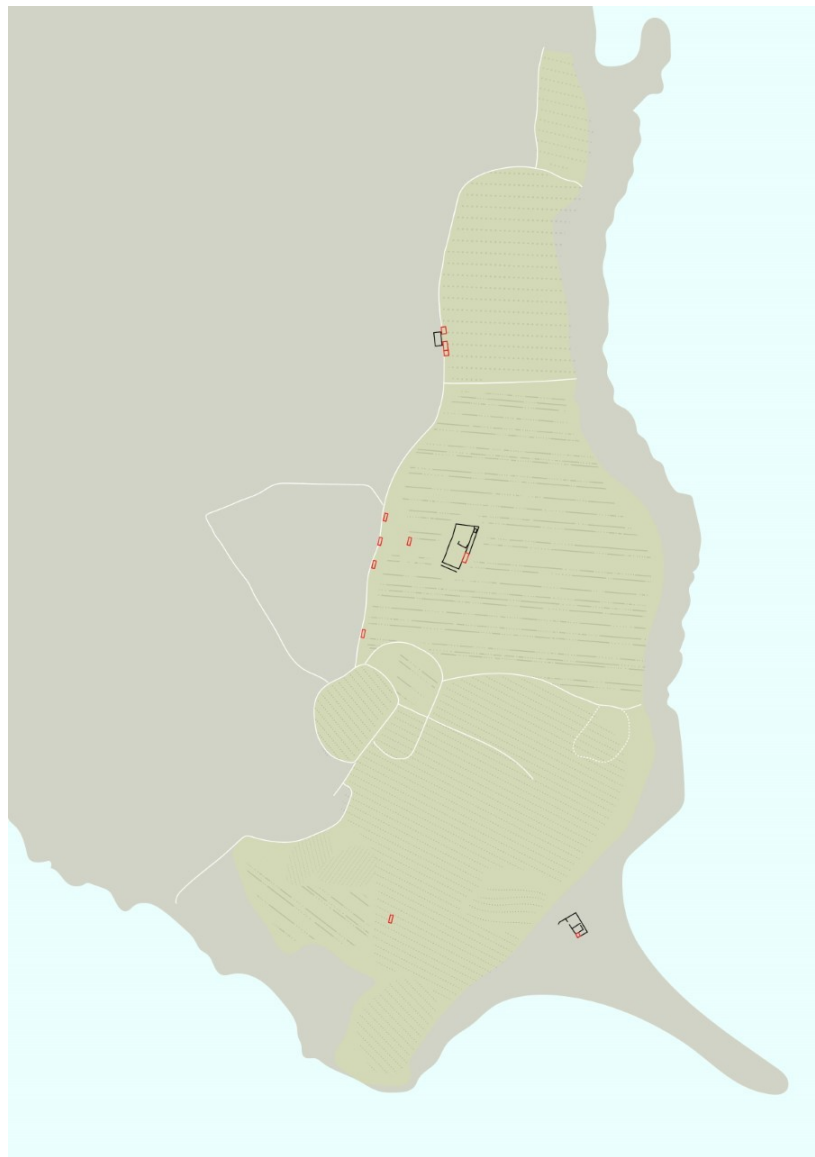
Aerial photo with cultivated areas showing up and marked clearly along with the stone dykes that were found.



Some of the stone dykes are pictured below.



This blanked out aerial shows the cultivated areas very clearly. The report indicates that there did not seem to be many people living permanently on the island so perhaps people travelled the short distance from the mainland to utilise the sheltered SE part of the island to supplement their acreage. What appears to be a type of head dyke would have separated the cultivated areas from any grazing livestock.



The area is now covered with deep thick moss that has grown as the drainage channels between the parallel banks of arable cultivation blocked up. No stackyards or corn drying kilns were found but these could be submerged in the vegetation. However the footings and ruins of several buildings were found and these are mapped and listed below.



OS map and aerial photo with position of sites marked.



Most of the ruins are situated at the edge of the improved area, adjacent to the head dyke.



List of sites.

1. NG 94660 93097 Large pile of boulders with surrounding placed boulders. Heavily overgrown with scrub and moss. Unable to determine its purpose.
2. NG 94570 93143 Footings of a turf and stone building measuring 7x 4.2m. There is a stone and turf dyke continuing up the hillside from the building.



3. NG 94517 93256 The remains of a turf and stone dyke that curves around the base of a hillside.



4. NG 94477 93354 A large lichen covered boulder that stands out from the hillside. A probable erratic but could be a standing stone connected with prehistoric settlement? It measures 3.5 x 2.5m



4. cont.



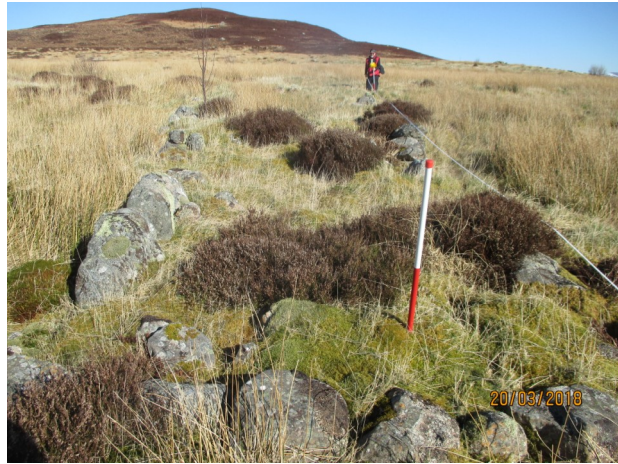
5. NG 94502 93375 A field dyke



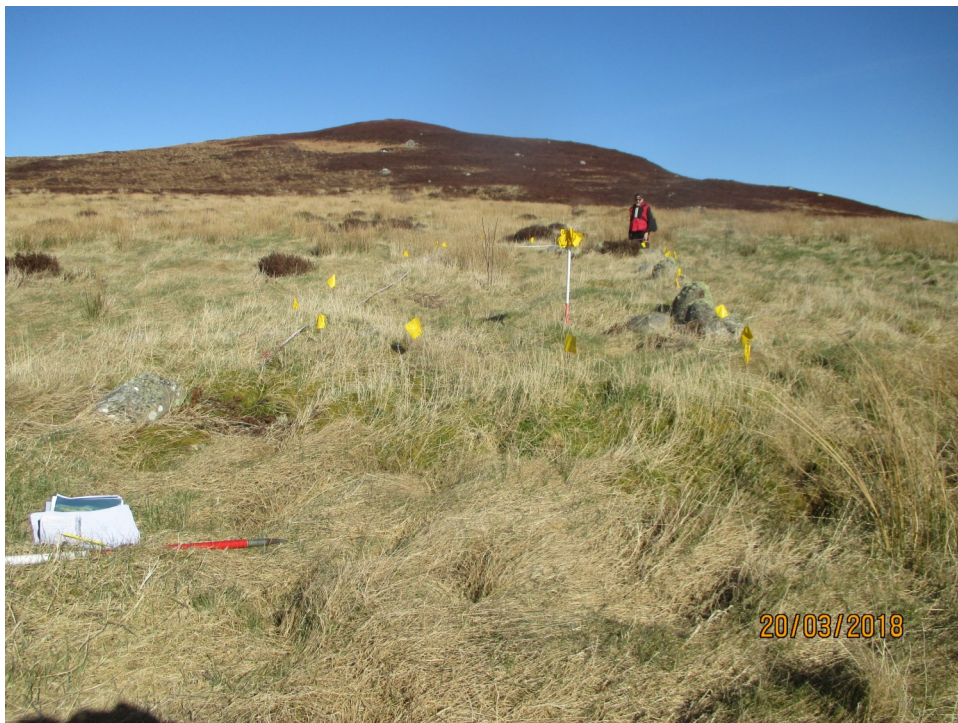
Some of the dykes comprised a line of large single boulders instead of constructed turf and stone dykes. A distinct difference.

It is possible that these dykes, which were often on curving enclosure boundaries were much earlier, and associated with earlier roundhouses that have since been destroyed by subsequent building and land improvement. The deep moss made it impossible to investigate further.

6. NG 94561 93465 Footings of a building measuring 16 x 5m with two compartments. The footings are made with large rough boulders.



7. NG 94578 93537 Footings of a building measuring 12.5 x 3.5m constructed with large boulders.

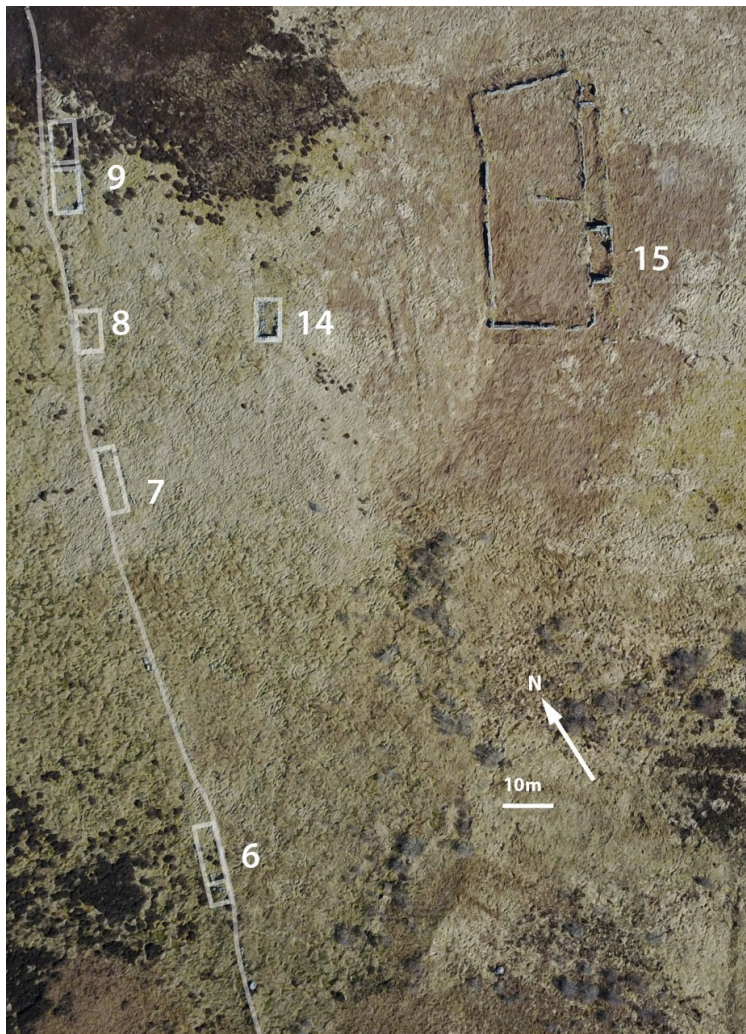




8. NG 94587 93564 Footings of a building measuring 6 x 2.5m



A drone shot shows the relative positioning of the buildings to each other and in the landscape.

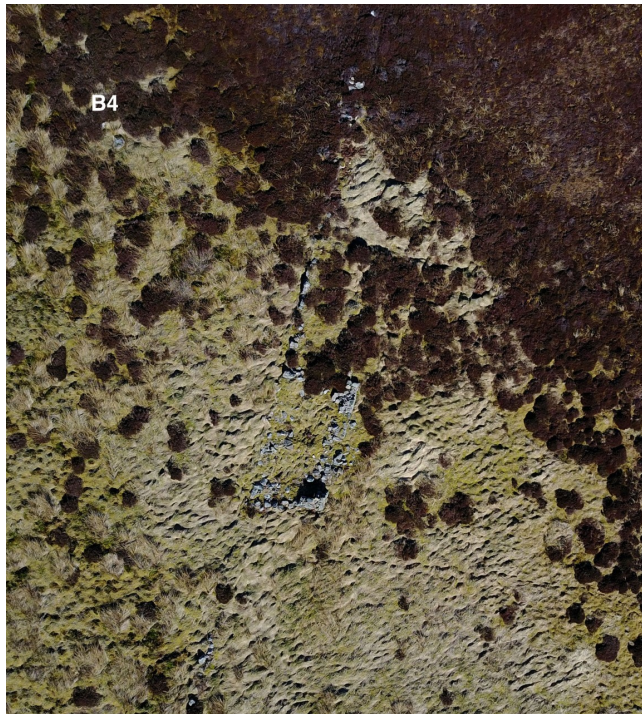




9. NG 94601 93595 Footings of two adjoining buildings measuring 8 x4m and 9 x 4m



Drone shot of the ruin.



Both images illustrate the thick deep covering of moss, grass, and heather. Note how the wall construction differs from the single large boulders previously seen. These walls have an inner and outer facing and are made with smaller boulders. It was difficult to establish features like entrances due to the tumbled nature of the ruins and vegetation cover.



10. NG 94679 93783 Footings of what appear to be a barn/byre with a central unroofed area adjoined by a house measuring 30 x 4.5m overall. There is a midden downslope from the barn/byre and an enclosure upslope. The walls are upstanding to a maximum height of 2m.

Approaching the ruin from the NW



Looking S. at the ruins with the house on the left and the enclosure in the foreground.



The house shown in this photo was constructed with chosen and shaped stones. The stones were layered and had snecking to make it watertight.



The barn was a phased building with rougher construction and had rounded inner corners. It had two entrances.





A drone shot of 10 with enhancement of features.



11. NG 94684 93856 Continuing wall of turf and stone leading from feature 10, SE down towards the sea.





12. NG 94712 93697 Footings of building measuring 7.5 x 5m



13. NG 94715 93654 Footings of building measuring 3 x 4m

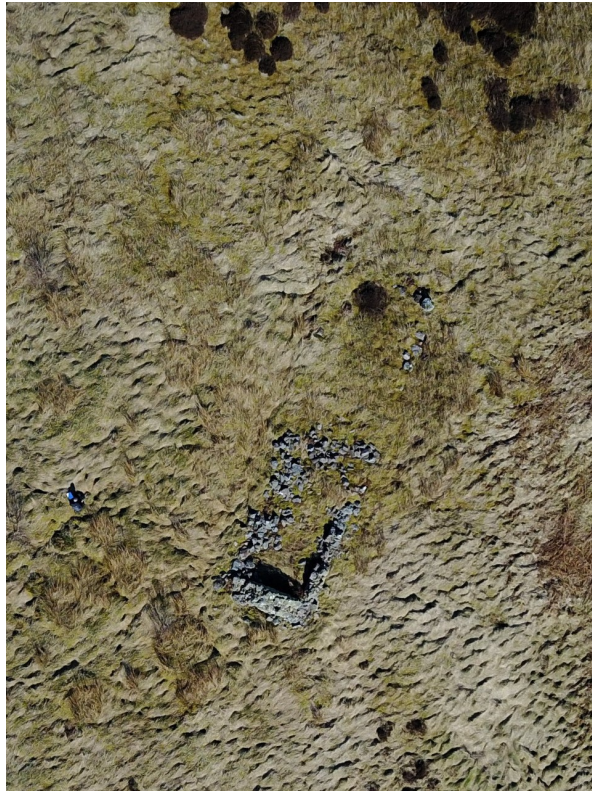


14. NG 94623 98556 Ruins of three adjoining buildings measuring 16.5 x 4.3m





A drone shot of feature 14 showing the layout of the buildings



15. NG 94686 93547 Ruin of walled enclosure with house and outbuildings built along three sides.

Enhanced drone shot showing ground plan of the ruin.





15 cont.



The enclosure from the NW



Looking S down the W side of enclosure



The house, note the layered stones in walls



The enclosure to rear of house is higher



The rough enclosure walls



Looking from the SW to ruins



16. NG 94844 93192 A slipway for landing boats



17. NG 94772 93113 Ruin of known shepherds bothy with adjoining fank and dipper. Also used by the MOD during anthrax experiments.

Enhanced drone shot showing layout of ruin





17. cont



The bothy from the SW



From the S. A building that has been altered



The outbuildings



Showing the dipper in the foreground



The building has been altered but the construction is of dressed stone that is layered with lime mortar used in the walls and a cement cap on the skewes.



18. NG 94848 93316 Burial ground.



Watson in his book 'Place Names of Ross and Cromarty' describes the ancient burial ground of Cladh Phris. The burial place of the bush or copse at the landing place S.E. It is also described as being beside a wall.

Oral history tells of people from up the glen bringing their dead to Gruinard island for burial to avoid the bodies being scavenged by predators.

Studying aerial photos it was noticed that there was a small enclosure beside a wall where there were no cultivation rigs. It was also at the edge of a copse and just up slope from the landing slipway.

Investigation found a ruined stone dyke heavily mossed over enclosing an area measuring 9 x 14m. On probing and removing some of the moss we discovered about a dozen stones placed at regular intervals within this area. Four were in a row, parallel to the boundary wall.

The stones were also carefully chosen, not just cobbles off the beach. There was quartzite, mica schist, patterned sandstone, and a stone with quartzite nodules through it. No engravings were found on the stones but this is not unusual.

We concluded that this was the noted burial ground.



View from the burial ground looking S. The outline of the low stone walls can be seen in the foreground.



Some of the stones in the burial ground.





## Anthrax experiment evidence.



Following the research into the anthrax experiment on Gruinard and after looking at maps and diagrams, it was noted that the marked experimental area treated with anthrax matches an area with distinct colouration change in the vegetation.

In an attempt to remove the anthrax spores, the area was first of all burnt during the war and then treated with Formaldehyde in 1986 ( see report )

The above aerial photo has the area marked in pale green.